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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (07/28): Palestinians looking for action after US official visits

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Main Stories:  
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Local media run prominent coverage on US diplomatic efforts in the region. Al-Quds's lead headline reads "Mitchell, Gates and Jones in the region, Amr Moussa reiterates Arab States' refusal to take any steps towards normalizing relations with Israel prior to cessation of settlements, Intensive US efforts to push the peace process forward." Al-Quds reports on Special Envoy George Mitchell's talks in Cairo on July 27 with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Mitchell thanked Egypt for its leading role in achieving regional peace and urged the Palestinians to take positive steps towards achieving security and peace in the region. He also asked the Arab States to take serious steps towards normalization with Israel to pave the way for a successful peace process.

The dailies all run front page coverage on Mitchell's July 27 visit to the Palestinian Territories and meetings with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. Al-Ayyam leads with news that Mitchell informed the Palestinians that the US is still committed to road map obligations concerning the cessation of settlement activity and assured the Palestinians that the US will not take any decision without consulting with them. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat noted to the press after the meetings that Mitchell informed Abbas that there is no US-Israeli agreement regarding the continuation of settlement construction. Erekat noted that the PA will continue to implement all of its road map obligations and that Israel must withdraw from all Arab land prior to normalizing relations under the terms of the Arab Peace Initiative.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida runs front page coverage citing Wafa news agency that US Defense Minister Robert Gates arrived in Jordan on July 27 after his visit to Israel. Gates met with King Abdullah and discussed efforts to achieve peace in the region. In a statement issued by the King's office, the King noted that "reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian cause that leads to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state is the foundation for achieving peace and security in the region." King Abdullah praised US efforts to help resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Al-Quds runs separate front page coverage citing AFP on the Israeli Minister of Trade and Commerce Binyamin Ben Eliezer noting on July 27 that the US realizes that construction in West Bank settlements will continue. The minister noted that "the Americans have started to understand that construction underway to absorb needed natural growth in the settlements cannot be stopped," and added that the US realizes that Arab States are not ready to take steps towards normalization with Israel.

Al-Ayyam runs front page coverage citing AFP that an official report published by the Israeli daily Haaretz notes that there are more than 300,000 settlers residing in the West Bank and that this number is increasing every day despite efforts to halt settlement activities.

News on the Sixth Fatah Party Congress receives front page coverage in all Palestinian media. Al-Ayyam notes that the PA requested the mediation of Syria, Turkey, Russia and Egypt to convince Hamas to allow Fatah members residing in Gaza to participate in the

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conference scheduled for August 4 in Bethlehem. The coverage noted that the PA is ready to release 200 Hamas detainees in the West Bank as a gesture of goodwill.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1) Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title, "Will the European role continue to remain subsidiary to the US role?" (07/28): "Although the European countries try to express their reservations concerning settlements, checkpoints and closures, their positions are very timid...Everyone realizes that the European role is subsidiary to the US role, but at this stage it is necessary to have a more powerful and influential European role to ensure better support of the peace process, end the occupation, and halt settlement activity."

2) Hafeth Barghouti opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the title "A peace with settlements" (07/28): "It seems like the Americans are convinced now that they can't force Israel to halt settlement activity...Therefore we see the US envoys visiting the Arab States to promote the idea of normalization and to encourage them to take steps that will contribute to building trust with Israel. This serves no one but Netanyahu and his vision of an economic peace".

WALLES